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THE SHEPHERD PSALM

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HENRY HOWARD

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THE SHEPHERD PSALM

BY

HENRY HOWARD

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The Raiment of the Soul,' &c.

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PSALM XXIII

The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

PROLOGUE

ON the face of the earth from earliest times there have been spots where, by common consent, men have massed, building themselves cities and finding their unity. So on the great continent of sacred literature there have ever been points of centralization, where human souls instinctively have gathered, forgetting the things that divided them, and remembering only those that made them one. Such a metropolitan seat and centre is the Twenty-third Psalm. It has been the meeting-point of the ages. Around it men and women

of every rank and race have gathered with profound and holy joy, and from it have drawn the courage to attempt, the power to achieve, and the patience to endure.

For most of us this Psalm must rank among the earliest pieces of sacred literature with which the memory was entrusted, so that from childhood we have been familiar with the cadence of its song. Such familiarity with Scripture has, of course, untold advantages, but it also has its risks. The peril is lest it should obscure the vision by dulling expectancy. An illustration from common life will help to make this clear.

A now wealthy citizen of the Australian Commonwealth loves

to tell a story of his early struggles for a living. A working miner, with a wife and young family dependent upon him, he was faced with hard times. He worked his own claim, but weeks went by without finding the welcome gold. Their little stock of savings vanished, till finally they were reduced to bread and water. One memorable Saturday, before leaving for his work, he remarked to his wife that unless the washing of the week's dirt resulted favourably there would not be even bread for the children's dinner on the coming day. But the brave-hearted woman cheered him with the reminder that God had never yet allowed them to want, and that they had His promise that He never would.

Thus comforted he started for the claim, only to discover on the cleaning up that there was not even the colour of the precious metal to be seen for all his toil. The home-coming was a heavy-hearted business, and to his wife's eager inquiry his only answer was a look of dumb despair. Still her woman's faith rose in the scale of the disappointment. 'Let us tell God all about it,' she said, and round the empty table knelt father and mother and children and poured out their trouble in prayer. With a somewhat lighter heart the miner rose to his feet. Observing that the sky had meanwhile darkened with a coming storm, he remarked that if they could not procure food for Sunday they could and

should at least have warmth, and proceeded axe in hand to chop some wood. Before he had time, however, to leave the door, the storm burst with a wild fury and the rain swept down in torrents. Then the sky suddenly cleared, and he started for the wood-heap. In such a home, the track to the wood-heap is usually a well-known path to the man of the house. Had he been asked that day whether he expected to find anything extraordinary in that well-beaten track he would have judged it an idle question, for what expectation could he have? Did he not know every inch of it by heart?

But, sure enough, as he strode down the familiar way that Saturday afternoon, there gleamed

from the midst of the path at his very feet, a glittering point of light. It was but the work of a moment for him to drop his axe, bring out his knife, and work around the shining speck, which grew larger as he worked, till he presently unearthed a nugget as big as his fist. In a tumult of thankful joy he bore it to the house, laid it reverently on the table—and then and there father, mother, and children knelt again in thankful praise to Him who had thus turned their sighing into singing, and their night into day.

Now, this Twenty-third Psalm is a well-beaten track. It may be that because we have trodden it so frequently we imagine ourselves to have exhausted its

spiritual content, and fancy there remains no more for our search. Let the story of the miner come as a corrective to this illusion. There are untold riches waiting yet to be unearthed. The nugget he discovered had been there all the while. He had walked over it a thousand times, but it was invisible. Here two important truths emerge—two great revealing conditions, the one objective, the other subjective, and each having its spiritual analogue. First of all there was the ministry of the storm, which swept aside the obscuring medium of earth and laid bare the unsuspected wealth. So in the great crises of life, under the stress of storm and tempest, the veil of mere words in prophecy or psalm is rent in

twain, and the spiritual riches they conceal are unfolded to our view. Then, again, there was the purged vision of the miner, rendered abnormally alert by a loving solicitude for those who were dearer to him than life. It would, indeed, have had to be a very fine speck of gold to have escaped his eye that afternoon. And so when, stung by some great need and with a vision cleansed by sorrow, our own or some one else's, we have turned to these familiar Scriptures, they have glowed with a new and beauteous light.

These words, then, are 'spirit and they are life.' But words at the best are only imperfect exponents of thought. They only 'half reveal and half conceal the

soul within.' On the threshold of these studies, then, let us pause for a season, and seek the gift of spiritual insight, that we may catch the hidden meaning that beats and burns beneath the written word. Otherwise we shall find ourselves at the close of our meditations simply in possession of an empty nest from which the spirit-bird has flown.

The Psalm

'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.'

PSALM xxiii. 1.

THE Oriental shepherd was always ahead of his sheep. He was down in front. He was eyes and ears, heart and brain for his flock. Any attack upon them had to take him into account. He was the defence force—the advance guard, that had to be measured and reckoned with. Now, what the Eastern shepherd was to his sheep, God is to His people. He is down in front, both as to time and place.

He is in the to-morrows of our history. It is to-morrow that tyrannizes over men and fills them with dread. It is the unknown that paralyses the heart and puts such tension on the nerves. But once let the thought of God as Shepherd take its place among the certainties of our life, and straightway we are delivered from this thrall. The future is guaranteed. He is there already. All the to-morrows of our life have to pass Him before they can get to us. We literally take them from His hand. We step down into to-morrows that are filled and flooded with God. The deduction for the psalmist was inevitable: 'I shall not want.' 'Want' and 'Jehovah' are mutually exclusive ideas. They

cannot co-exist in the mind excepting in antithesis. They cancel each other. Jehovah stands for all a man needs for time and for eternity. Give a worried man, or a careworn woman, this assurance, and at once life takes on a different complexion, and moves upward to a higher plane. He who is not delivered from the fear of want can never touch the highest levels of life or achievement. Christ saw this when He said, 'Be not anxious for the morrow,' and assured His hearers that it was along the lines of fulfilled relations to God that life would find all its satisfaction and supply.

This shepherdly care of Jehovah makes every life a divine plan. It redeems it from caprice. The

tendency of our day is to reduce everything to law. Scientific men tell us that in the world of matter there is no such thing as chance. The unexpected does not happen. The universality of law is an accepted fact. The air we breathe, the water we drink, are composed of gases which if mixed in slightly different proportions would work our destruction. If the laboratory of nature were turned into a playground for lawless forces, what a chaos we should see! But there is no such thing as chance; and everything, from a molecule to a sun, is marshalled under law. But shall suns and systems have their appointed orbits, and human life be left to accident and caprice? Shall the soulless worlds of matter

that drift through the infinite spaces have the personal leading of Jehovah, and all the hosts of men be allowed to wander uncared for and untended in the barren wilderness of time? Nay. Even of the stars it is said, 'He calleth them all by name,' and we are of more value than many stars! They are but the furniture of His choice and many-chambered palace, but we are the children of His heart and His home. They are but waxing and waning splendours which come and go in the pauses of His breath, but we shall endure through all the years of the Most High. Let us not fear, then; the Brain that thinks for us, and the Heart that feels, are those of the Infinite Wisdom and Love. Jehovah is

our Shepherd, and we shall not want. His presence shall go with us, and He will give us rest. Let us put our little lives into His great keeping, living calmly with God moment by moment, and allowing the prospect of no to-morrow, however threatening, to throw its shadow across the pathway of to-day.

'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'

PSALM xxiii. 2.

THIS means two things at least—safety and satisfaction. An able-bodied sheep will never lie down if afraid, and certainly no sane sheep would think of lying down in green pastures until its hunger was appeased. Though dead lame with foot-disease, a hungry sheep will eat its way along painfully on its knees, rather than lie down amid green and tantalizing plenty. The line of thought thus suggested is exceedingly rich. Those whom God leads are secure. Not only so; they know they are. So

sure are they, that they can lie down and sleep. While the sheep sleep the grass grows. There is a beautiful and much-quoted verse of Scripture which, it is to be feared, is much misunderstood. So much so, indeed, that people place it on tombstones and make it stand for death, whereas in reality it relates to life. 'So He giveth unto His beloved sleep.' The revisers' marginal reading, 'in sleep,' when taken with the context, becomes finely suggestive that while life is lived apart from God it is a thing of hurry and worry, of perpetual and unavailing stir and strain, of rising early and retiring late in a strife as vain as it is vigilant. Yet as soon as it is placed under the shepherdly lead of the divine, it need no longer

keep its sleepless vigil, but may close its eyes, secure in the assurance that, because God does not sleep, it may. Safety without a corresponding sense of it is not sufficient. An imaginary danger is as disquieting as a real one. The soul requires to be assured of protection. There are the thousand and one ills of daily life that threaten us, and against which we need some protecting hand. From the moment that we cross the frontiers of life we have to run the gauntlet of countless diseases. The forces of the material world seem to have entered into an unholy league to oust us before we have even found our feet. Even should we succeed in effecting our escape, it is only for a time. The relentless

principle of mortality is ever on our trail, outwitting all our efforts to elude its grasp.

> . . . The foe,
> Like a stanch murderer steady to his purpose,
> Pursues the soul through every lane of life,
> Nor misses once the track.

Without some such assurance as our text conveys, men through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage. But from the tyranny of this dread we are delivered by the Shepherd of Souls. Under His rule even the forces of dissolution are made to subserve the ends of life. He makes us to lie down in green pastures and feel ourselves secure within the circle of His everlasting arms.

Then, too, there is satisfaction —the meeting of all our desires. God becomes the answer to all our longings, the fulfilment of all our hopes. He fathoms and fills the uttermost deeps of our being. Our souls lie back on Him and are satisfied—abundantly satisfied, finding in Him their being's end and aim. God made the soul for Himself; He has begotten within it a thirst that all the waters of time can never quench. This thirst, rightly interpreted, is the grand distinctive mark of our high origin—the prophecy of our return to God. Alas, that we should so often and persistently mistake our instincts and turn down our highest aspirations to the dust! The man who takes the lead of his life into his own

hands will assuredly sooner or later lie down in the scorching desert, with no shelter from the heat, no friendly rock to shadow him in the weary land. Let us here and now, then, submit to the shepherdly lead. For leading means following, and following means the surrender of the will. And in this surrender alone there is rest

From the burning of the noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.

'He leadeth me beside the still waters' (waters of quietness).

PSALM xxiii. 2.

THE two notions of activity and rest are beautifully blended in this verse. The repose of harmonious and frictionless movement is ever the Bible idea of peace, and not 'to rest in a golden grove or to bask in a summer sky.' But thus to strike the happy mean, the fine poise of a perfectly balanced life is impossible apart from the divine leading. We are overweighted on the active side. The quietistic side of life has for the most part fallen into neglect. In these days of

breathless haste and vexing competition, city men in particular are in danger of over-development on the physical and mental planes at the expense of the spiritual. The result is an ill-balanced life, feverish and out of tune. We are falling under bondage to the visible and tangible. We are the willing, or at least unresisting, thralls of the things we touch and see. The material world dominates us. It distorts our vision and confounds our sense of proportion and perspective. Under its spell we are losing our sense of distance. All our standards of valuation are of a material sort. We take no stock of wealth that is not convertible into coin. Moral values do not come into our reckoning.

And the saddest feature in the whole of this sad business is that this materializing process is going on in us without protest. We are consenting, tacitly at least, to this abridgement of our life on its highest side. We are turning the mere means of living into ends of life, and are mortgaging eternity to time. Now, this is a mistake on the score of mere utility. Medical men assure us that the majority of modern diseases are neurotic in their origin. We suffer, that is, from nervous exhaustion. We are using up brain material faster than it is made. We expend brain capital instead of brain interest, and the result is brain bankruptcy. So, then, for the sake of mere business efficiency, it is

necessary to fence off some periods of life for quiet contemplation—some spaces of retreat from the heat and passion of the market and the street, else we shall not live out the measure of our days.

But the supreme necessity is that of the soul. Its everlasting interests demand that material concerns shall be made subordinate to the spiritual, that time shall subserve eternity, if life is to become and achieve its best. Wordsworth tells us that—

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

But men without the shepherdly lead of Jehovah not only run

their powers to waste. They also cut themselves off from those recuperative forces which alone can brace them for the battle and the burden of their life. It is these 'waters of quietness' that refresh the spirit and reinforce us on the moral side, and without them we must faint and flag. Meditation is threatening to become a lost art, and certainly it looks as if we had but little time and less inclination for quiet thoughts of God and things unseen. The gospel of work is all very well, but it must be so held as not to exclude or over balance the complementary gospel of rest. Our fathers would have regarded it as atheism of the worst sort to leave no room for God in the programme of their day, no

vacant spaces cleared about the soul in which the shining ones might come and go between them and the great unseen. And if our leaf is not to wither amid the sultry heats and dusty ways of common life, we too must be led aside from the tumult of the world's busy week, and made to drink of the brook by the way. In other words, the roots of our being must be struck deep into the soul of fulfilled relations to God if we are to gather force and freshness for our daily work.

Without God this life is too heavy a liability, too tremendous a trust. The demands made upon us are more than we of ourselves can meet. If our lives are to be

full and rich and deep they must be immersed in God. The soul, like the body, requires an atmosphere. We must keep back the all-encroaching world, or it will rob us of our breathing-space, and thus reduce our moral tone. Hours of quiet meditation are never lost hours. These healing silences are not vacant solitudes, but peopled spaces, thronged with spiritual presences ordained to helpful ministries for the worn and wasted sons and daughters of men. Let us periodically seek the mount of meditation, which will become to us the mount of transfiguration, from which we shall descend with gathered power to grapple with the demons of the plain. Then those who know us best will

marvel at the force which we have made our own, and glorify God, who has given such power unto men.

'He restoreth my soul.'

PSALM xxiii. 3.

OUR psalm is deepening in spirituality and becoming more inward as it proceeds. Hitherto the shepherd care of Jehovah has been viewed in its relation merely to bodily needs. But man is something more than a body with a set of physical desires and appetites. He is a soul. There is that within him to which the temporal and material order is not correlated. There are sides of his being that Nature cannot touch. There are mountain peaks upon which her sunlight never falls, and slopes which all

her verdure cannot clothe. There are spaces that her fullness cannot fill, and depths which her deepest plummet cannot sound. The eye wearies for sights more beautiful, and the ear for harmonies more sweet, and the heart for friendships more abiding and for joys more deep and full, than those of time. Man has a set of faculties which are accommodated with a merely temporal residence in the body, in order that they may find a preparatory school for the earlier stages of their development before being launched on the timeless ranges of the life to come. No view of life can be complete which does not take this side of man into account, and no provision can be regarded as complete which does not meet its

needs. Nature is too poor to meet our deepest necessities. We possess a life higher and nobler than that which can be sustained by meat and drink. We hunger for bread that Nature never breaks to us. We thirst for waters that never gush from her springs. This soul-life of ours is subject to conditions similar to those by which all life is maintained and developed. We all know how much our physical well-being depends upon obedience to law, regularity and suitability of meals, adaptation and adjustment to varying conditions of climate, avoidance of risk, and judicious attention to exercise and rest. How soon the body runs down simply through mere neglect, and how slow is the climb back to

physical health! Now, the soul is subject to precisely similar laws. No one knew this better than David. He had lived a full life. He had known the extremes of want and wealth. He had endured the tortures of physical hunger and thirst, and had moved amid all the splendours of an Oriental court. He had mingled freely with the affairs of State, and knew all its ambitions and temptations, its plots and counter-plots. He had proved the de-spiritualizing effects of a voluptuous court life, and the necessity for restoration of soul; for, like the body, the soul runs down. And David had found that there was but one way of recovering spiritual tone, and that was in fulfilling personal relations with

a personal God. He—Jehovah—and He alone could reinforce him on the moral side, and so brace him up that he could say 'No' to the clamour of unholy desire.

What was true for David is true for us. Nothing can take the place of God. Religious observances, sacraments, good books, and all the countless aids to holy living are secondary and subordinate to the immediate access of the soul to the Personal Presence of the Supreme. God, and God alone, can gird the soul with strength to put temptation beneath its feet, to take duty by the hand, and to discharge the manifold offices of life.

'He restoreth my soul' (He turneth back my desires).

PSALM xxiii. 3.

WE are dividing the study of this verse into two parts, because of the variant reading placed above, which, to say the least of it, is deeply suggestive. No redemption can be regarded as complete which does not regenerate the desires. All sin commences in desire. This is where it must be treated to be dealt with effectively. We must be saved not only from wandering, but from wishing to wander. It is not enough that our feet be kept in the narrow path while our desires are running down the

broad road that leadeth to destruction. God undertakes to head off our inclinations to wrong and keep us from hankering after the forbidden thing. He saves not only from the overt act, but from the inner disposition. And He does this, not by the crushing out of desire, but by re-directing it. He cleaves new channels for our affections, along which they may flow in deep, full streams towards all that is noblest and best. The unsanctified man has on board a crew of mutinous desires that require to be reduced to loyalty, else they will run the vessel of his life upon the breakers to a swift and certain doom. This, then, is God's work, to walk up and down among this clamorous crew of unruly desires, reducing

them to subjection and making them subserve His will. By thus touching our life at its innermost centre and ruling it from within, He makes it chime in with the eternal harmony, and thus prepares it for the

> One, far-off, divine event, to which the whole creation moves.

This renewing of our desires is brought about by the insertion of a new love. What the old divines used to call ' the expulsive power of a new affection ' is the principle upon which God relies to effect a change of life and character. What a man loves supremely, that he comes to resemble, by a subtle but masterful law. If his love runs low and fixes upon earthly things, then the tendency

of his life will be inevitably downwards, 'what is fine within him growing coarse to sympathize with clay.' If, on the other hand, his love goes out for the pure and lofty, then his life will be in perpetual ascension till it bursts into fair and fragrant flower. In its last analysis our verse is a confession of truancy. There is an implicit acknowledgement of moral failure and defeat. The psalmist does not credit himself with the power of self-recovery. It is not by the firmness of his own resolutions, the strength of his own purposes, or the might of his own mind, that this change has been brought about in the current of his desires. Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, has wrought it, and He who did this thing for

David will do it for us, if we be but willing. Let us have no confidence in our own determinations, for 'in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' In this struggle against the lower nature within and the currents of evil without, the arm of God alone can sustain us, and His presence alone can cheer. But God can and will, for all who trust His grace, work this wondrous miracle of purity and peace.

'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

PSALM xxiii. 3.

PART I.

THIS is the second time the word 'lead' occurs in our psalm; but it is with a totally different signification. The Authorized Version gives no hint of any change of meaning, but the revisers have substituted the word 'guide' for 'lead' as an indication that the distinction should be noted. The fact is that the word translated 'leadeth' in the first case implies something done *for* the psalmist. He is catered

for, provisioned. The Septuagint says 'fostered' or 'nurtured,' so that the reference is primarily to the meeting of physical needs; whereas the Hebrew word which lies behind the second word 'leadeth' implies something done *in* the psalmist. Rightly interpreted, it is really an amplification of the thought expressed in the previous verse, and is no less important for what it assumes than for what it affirms. Behind this verse lies the whole black tragedy of the Fall. It is unexpressed, but implied. It forms the dark background upon which is written in letters of light the glorious gospel of recovery and hope.

Of late years there has been a good deal of petty criticism

expended over the Bible narrative of the Fall. And while there may be no necessity to plead for the historic correctness of every detail in that dramatic story, yet its central truth so fits in with the facts of history and individual consciousness as to present a powerful presumption of the essential correctness of the record. The objection that the Eternal would not make the destiny of the creature turn on so trifling a matter as his consent or refusal to take of the forbidden fruit, utterly misconceives the whole situation. On the question of loyalty to the Will of the Highest, one test is as good as another. The question had to be narrowed down to a point where, clear of all entanglements,

the human will must definitely declare itself with or against the Will of the Divine. For the purpose of ascertaining this, an apple would serve as well as an asteroid!

This verse discloses the moral purpose of all God's leading, viz. restoration to righteousness—that is, right relations with God. This is the end of all revelation—righteousness! It is the keynote of the Scriptures from Genesis to the Apocalypse. All the economies of providence and grace have been framed for this purpose and adjusted to this end. This it is which gives moral unity to all God's dealings with men, and resolves the tangled web of history into an ordered plan. For this, white-robed priests were anointed

with holy oil and prophets' lips were touched with sacred fire. For this was Abraham called and Israel chosen, and for this were all the disciplinary processes of the wilderness-march. This is the master-purpose, never for a moment lost sight of or obscured. It is a purpose that achieves itself in spite of, nay, often by very means of, human disappointment, defeated ambition, baffled purpose, and shattered plan. It is a redeeming purpose, running deep and full and strong through all the courses of the suns, and through all the changes of history, to issue at length in the home-bringing of all God's wandering children to the warmth and welcome of the Father's house. But this

purpose of righteousness, though it be God's own, cannot be fulfilled, excepting with man's full and free consent. Hence God 'guides,' not drives. Every idea of force in the administration of redemption must be cut out of our calculations, because for God to override at any point the free agency of the creature would be to destroy the fundamental principle of moral government and reduce the creature to the level of a mere machine. Guiding assumes consent to be led, and consent means the surrender of the personal will. This brings us to the very heart of our subject. All sin when reduced to its final analysis is selfishness or self-will. If, therefore, God is to bring men back to righteousness it must be

by winning the will. Whatever force He brings to bear upon the creature must be of a nature that will respect his manhood. It must be moral, and not physical. While He may rule the stars in their courses 'because He is strong in power,' and make the sun to know his going down by the mere 'word of His might,' He must woo the creature by His Spirit—He must win, because He cannot force, His love. Omnipotence, in the sense of physical force, may be able to overtake a wandering planet and curve it again to its orbit, but it is utterly powerless in the realm of the affections. This, however, is precisely the realm that has broken loose from God and that He is seeking to regain. Hence

the whole divine ministry of long-suffering patience and all-hopeful love which makes the heart of the psalmist rejoice. Now, the ground of David's confidence that God will do this thing is expressed in the words, 'For His name's sake.' There is more in this phrase, which slips so glibly from the lips, than perhaps at first appears. The unfolding of its inner meaning we must leave for our next study. In the meantime let it be remembered that restoration to righteousness turns entirely on our own consent. By a single act of purposeful will we may put ourselves in line with the saving forces which are making for moral regeneration and uplift. But by mere neglect, and without any wilful intent, we

may allow salvation to go by default till we find the 'harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'

'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

PSALM xxiii. 3.

PART II.

IT is with the phrase 'For His name's sake' that we have now to deal. It is important, because it forms the ground of David's confidence. It is that on which he builds the certainty of his faith. We want to know what this corner-stone is, upon which he rears so mighty a structure. 'His name's sake!' 'What's in a name' that it should thus become a guarantee of all that David claims? Names with us are often mere vocables. We

give names to our children simply because they are euphonious, or for the sake of perpetuating the memory of some ancestor. In this regard, however, we have receded sadly from the ideal. The very designation 'Christian name,' as distinguished from 'surname,' carried with it in its earlier bestowment the hope and expectation of a corresponding Christian character and career. To give a child its Christian name was thus to affirm its Christian status, and carried with it a pledge on the part of the parents to train that child for Christ. Would that we could recover the spirit of this ancient practice and thus recharge it with the original significance for which it stood! Names as bestowed in the Bible

were expressive of character or office, and when a man's character or office was changed it was indicated by a change of name. Numerous examples might be given if space permitted, but a few will suffice to illustrate the principle. Take the case of Abraham. His original name was 'Abram,' indicative of his moral and spiritual pre-eminence—literally, 'the high father, or the father of height.' When, however, on account of his superior moral fitness, he was selected to be the head of a great nation, God changed his name to *Abraham*, which set forth his official character and signified 'the father of a multitude.' Jacob, whose name stood for cunning and trickery, underwent a great moral

and spiritual crisis at Peniel, and from that hour he was no more called 'Jacob,' but 'Israel,' because as 'a prince he had power with God and prevailed.' Names as God employs them always stand for moral ideas. He has revealed Himself under many names, but they each express some attribute of His character. They are scattered like glittering gems throughout the sacred records; but not one of them shall be lost. He will yet gather them all up and bind them as a gleaming chaplet about His brow, so that in their mingled splendour the glory of His character may stand revealed. But what particular name does the psalmist refer to in this verse? Clearly the name by which God revealed

Himself to Moses, and with which David opens this Psalm, viz., 'Jehovah,' and translated in our version 'The Lord.' Literally translated it is 'I Am.' Now, one at least of the ideas sought to be conveyed by this wonderful name is that of self-existence, that is to say, independent existence. But if God be Independent Existence, then all other existence must be dependent, and this dependence carries with it certain claims which God, by the very assumption of this name, admits. In Exod. xxxiv. God unfolds or renders explicit the ethical contents of His own revealed Name: 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.' Here, then,

is David's ground of confidence —it is laid in the moral character of God. Clearly God as Independent Being holds relations to all dependent beings. But relations everywhere carry obligations, not merely from the creature upward to the Creator, but from the Creator downward to the creature. God was free to create man or to refrain. But having created him, He thereby created obligations for Himself, which, if He would, He could not escape. By creating free agents He created the possibility of sin. He could not make virtue possible without creating this risk. All the possibilities up and down of a human soul must have been present to the Divine Mind before He uttered the creative word.

He has not been surprised by sin as by a contingency unforeseen and unprovided for. It was not only foreknown but arranged for, and indeed it was necessary for the vindication of the divine character that a process of grace and recovery could be shown to have been included in the original plan, that the Atonement should not appear to be an after-thought of the Divine Mind. Hence it is written that the Lamb was 'slain from the foundation of the world.' God's moral character, therefore, is involved in this business of salvation. It was not optional with Him as to whether He should send His Son or not. There were moral imperatives laid upon Him. Hence, said our Lord: 'Ought not the Christ to have suffered?'

And again: 'It behoved Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead the third day.' Here is a recognition of moral obligation on the part of God. He has no more right than an earthly parent to allow His children to wander in paths of sin without exhausting every effort to secure their return. The Cross of Calvary thus becomes as much a necessity from the divine as from the human side. It is love's necessity seeking that it may save. When we thus see that God is so anxious for our return that He is willing to suffer in order to secure it, our rebellious wills are conquered, and we are put on the highway of that righteousness which leads unerringly to the city the light whereof is the Lamb.

Before passing from this verse let it be noted that the plural '*paths*' of righteousness is finely suggestive. Clearly righteousness is no single narrow track unrelated to the highways of life, and along which the godly man must hurry, apologizing for intruding and eager to escape. No! Righteousness comprises paths many and various, and ramifying through the whole of life—paths personal and domestic, social and commercial, professional and political, literary and artistic, philosophical and scientific. Righteousness embraces the whole sphere of a man's possible activities, finding here and now, in the working days of life, an ample field for the unfolding of its powers. Such a view lifts up the whole round of

daily toil, and, by relating it to the moral order, at once redeems it from sordidness and suffuses it with 'a light that never was on sea or land.'

'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

PSALM xxiii. 4.

PART I.

NO religion can be regarded as satisfactory which does not stand by a man in the great crises of his history. Its supreme test is, how it bears the strain of tragic moments. There come deeply sad and solemn days in every man's history. There are times when the light goes out of the life, when the soul sits alone in the darkness and the heart is smitten

with the sickening pang of hope that has been long deferred. In these deep moments, when the grave opens in our path, and death seems to be the end of all, we need some steadying hand, some reassuring word, lest we stagger and fall. David had seen such times. His was a strangely chequered career, a life of thrilling scene, of hairbreadth escape and startling incident; a life of physical peril and moral lapse. Yet never for a moment had God forgotten him. Even in his widest and most woful wanderings God had followed him, seeking and finding and bringing him home. The confident forecast of this verse is built up on past experiences of God's shepherdly love and care. He sees that love,

not only redeeming life from caprice, but death from despair. This psalm is broadly synthetic. It takes in the whole of life, measures the sweep of its vast circumference, and sees death as simply part of a plan. Clearly in his view it is not a contingency which may be avoided or an intrusion which has to be submitted to, and which having appeared must be made to subserve some good purpose, but could have been better done without. No; it is rather a divine and pre-arranged process, through which life evolves from more to more, and passes ever upwards to higher circles of being and nobler grades of service.

Now, it is poor philosophy which

feels called upon to ignore death. That is an ostrich policy which thrusts its head into a bush and refuses to face facts because they are unpleasant. Let us be men, and bring the future before us. It was a habit with these ancients to anticipate death. They were accustomed to bring it forward, to scan its face, look into its eyes, and grow familiar with its features, till it lost its power to blanch their cheeks or put a tremor on their lips. They knew the worst that death could do, and faced it fearlessly like men. What wonder that with such a Shepherd they should fear no ill! But if David, who moved about in the dim light of that pre-Christian age before the Resurrection of Christ had filled and flooded the death-

problem with the white radiance of immortality, could strike so triumphant a note, then what should be our song in the sevenfold light of these post-Resurrection days? Alas! it has to be confessed that much of Judaism and Paganism still mingles with our Christianity. Do we indeed believe the Saviour's words, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life'? Then in this, as in many other things, our practice too frequently gives the lie to our creed. If we believe that Christ, for all who live and die in Him, has for ever sanctified the tomb, and that the gate of death is but the entrance to a fuller and a larger life, then how can we justify our hopeless grief for those removed? Ought not the

passing of every pure soul to be the occasion not for clamant grief, but for holy and triumphant joy? Oh for the faith that will bear our loved ones to their quiet resting-place, keying its ritual to the triumphant note of the Apostle Paul, 'O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' While for ourselves, let us march towards the pale kingdom with no thought or dread of ill, but stepping gladly to the music of these wonderful words, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

PSALM xxiii. 4.

PART II.

MOST men will agree that it is the loneliness of death that constitutes its chief dread. If we could die in families, in groups, in communities; if hand in hand we could move down the dark valley, hand in hand breast the dark river, hand in hand pass into the Paradise of God, then death would indeed lose much of its

terror and gloom. But, alas! each must die for himself, even though he may die with others. Loved ones, however dear, can only see us off. The most they can do is to smooth our passage down to the edge of the shadow, and then wish us a good voyage as we embark. Last words have to be spoken, final leave has to be taken; and then alone, as far as human eye can see, and unattended, the soul must pass out into the night that men call death. So, indeed, it seems to our dull sight; but not to the psalmist's. With a prophet's keen vision he pierces the veil, and, seeing no break in the sheltering care of the All-Fatherly hand, triumphantly declares that even the death-crisis cannot

come between him and his Shepherd-Guide. 'Thou art with me!' What a world of comfort is folded up in this assurance! How it changes the complexion of death to have pledged to us the personal companionship of Jehovah through this dark approach to the Kingdom of Light! Then, too, look at the truths sought to be conveyed by the 'rod' and the 'staff.' These are not, as many might suppose, interchangeable terms, or different names for the same thing. With the shepherd's staff or crook we are all familiar, and its uses are too obvious to require explanation. But the rod is quite another thing. It might be more correctly interpreted 'club,' for it consisted of a

short stick with a heavy knob, which was used by the shepherd for dealing a death-blow to any wild beast that might attack either him or his flock. It was slung on his girdle by day, and on his wrist by night, and, skilfully used, could crush the skull of a lion or bear. This club, as a matter of fact, was the original of our modern sceptre and mace. The first kings of the world were shepherd kings, and the club became in those early days the symbol of power, authority, and rule. We thus extract this comforting assurance from our text, that the death-valley is under the sceptre of our Shepherd-King. This is the pledge of law and order and safety. Why are we able as

British subjects to work and rest, to eat and drink and sleep in such security? Is it not because we are under the English sceptre? This means safety and the sense of it for man and woman and little child. So with regard to this matter of death. Its time, its place, its manner are not handed over to lawlessness or caprice. They are divinely ordered and assigned. They are under the Sceptre. Wherever the servant of God may be, even though in the valley of death, he is on the King's highway, and that means security and safe conduct to the City of the King. Let us not be afraid. We need not die alone. We may so live that when the end comes we may be divinely attended, and

have nothing whatever to do but let slip the staff of our pilgrimage and grasp the hand of our Shepherd-Guide.

'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

PSALM xxiii. 4.

PART III.

WE have already seen that we are not left to the dim light of Old Testament revelation with regard to death. Beautiful as is the psalmist's confession of his faith, it is after all purely negative. There is no positive rapture in his forecast of physical dissolution. He is simply delivered from fear. It is not until we come to the wider horizons of

New Testament outlook that the note of triumph is struck. 'Thanks be to God which giveth us the VICTORY through our Lord Jesus Christ.' This victorious note is infinitely in advance of David's song, as well it might be, leaping from the lips of one who had caught the voice and vision of David's Lord. Paul has much to say of death; and in one of his great moments of insight he utters a profound and reassuring truth. David saw that no man dieth *by* himself. Paul saw that no man dieth *to* himself. His system of thought not only included the fact of death, but rescued it from apparent disorder by setting it in relation to the Risen Christ, the Lord of the living and the dead.

In spite of all appearances,

death has been made subservient to life. Since Jesus died and rose again it has been shown to be life's vassal and to serve its ends. Thus viewed, death has no power to touch life's essence or to break its continuity. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it can even for a single moment cloud the real consciousness of man. There are numberless cases on record, in which a patient has been pronounced unconscious by his medical attendant, and yet upon recovery has declared that all the time and without a break he was perfectly self-conscious, and not only so, but was the recipient of impressions and experiences through other gateways than those of the five senses, which he was able to record with such

accuracy of detail as to leave no room for doubt as to their genuineness. Even Paul himself on at least two occasions became, so to speak, unconscious so far as this world was concerned. But he was not only perfectly self-conscious, but in correspondence with a world of spiritual being, whose forces played in upon him so freely, and stamped themselves upon his mind so indelibly, as to take their place for ever among the most abiding of his mental impressions. Such being the case, we can quite understand how henceforth in his estimation it was life and not death which filled and suffused his horizon.

We want, if possible, to gain Paul's view-point that we may also share his thought. Our peril

is that of allowing death to bulk too largely in our view, and not giving it its proper perspective. It is made in our calculations to count for more than its value. Its importance is purely relative and derived. It is really the significance of life which imparts solemnity to death. Death is simply God's angel in waiting on the threshold of the unseen, to disrobe the soul of its earthly garment preparatory to its passing into the presence-chamber of the King. 'For flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' But whether we linger yet awhile in the outer court, or pass to the inner, whether 'unclothed or clothed upon,' we are His subjects all the same, 'for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or

whether we die we die unto the Lord, so that whether we live or die we are the Lord's.' Our common relation to Christ as our Head puts us and keeps us in relation to each other, and clearly death has no power to dissolve these ties. Our loved ones, who have passed within the veil, have not 'died to themselves,' but to their Lord and ours. They have not been started out on lonely and isolated careers. They do not land upon that coast, like emigrants on a strange and distant shore, without friends or welcome. No, they die into a society of immortals, where they are expected, awaited, and prepared for. 'That great Shepherd of the sheep who was brought again from the dead,' who knows them

each and loves them each, and calls them each by name, Himself meets and greets them. 'They hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the Throne shall shepherd them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.'

PSALM xxiii. 5.

WE are now confronted with a change in the figure. There is a break in the unity of the metaphor. Sheep are not accommodated with tables or provided with cups, nor are they anointed with oil. What is the meaning of this change of metaphor? The reason is found in the fact that the figure of a shepherd's care for his flock, beautiful though it may be, is utterly inadequate to set forth the intimacy of relation between the psalmist's soul and God.

Consequently in this verse the shepherd passes into a host and the sheep into a guest. Quite a new set of ideas gather around this enlarged and enriched conception. As a matter of fact, we can never know God till we become guests in His house and sit at His table. It is there that He unfolds Himself as nowhere else. We do not even know each other until we have come into one another's homes, and sat at one another's tables. The family meal is a time of self-revelation. Many a man, who passes for a stern and unbending churl amid the rough-and-tumble of the outside world, is found to relax into almost womanly tenderness when surrounded by those whom he loves, and amid all the sweet and

wholesome ministries of the home. There he is understood, and there he can unbosom himself in its sanctity. Unless you have privileged access to that home, you will never know what a wealth of human-hearted affection and consideration for others he manages to conceal in his intercourse with the outer world. And so in His house does God make Himself known as in no other place. Alas! that He should so often prepare His table and His guests prefer to wander in His grounds admiring the beauty of His physical creation, but having no taste for the moral beauty of His character, which He is waiting to unfold and impart to those who will sit at His board.

Then what a host is God!

With what wealth of provision does He spread the feast! Observe, it is a prepared meal. No hurried snack hastily arranged, no improvised meal, as though the guest had dropped in unexpectedly and unannounced. God's guests are expected and prepared for. This Host is never overtaken by contingency or surprise. There is a leisureliness and repose about this verse which conveys the idea of the psalmist's perfect security as the guest of God. What a magnificent scorn of his foes, to be able thus to eat before them! A man cannot eat when afraid. When a great fear lays its paralysing hand upon the heart, the desire for food dies away. But the psalmist is able to sit down under

the very gaze of his foes and show his contempt for them and their threats by enjoying his meal to the full.

There is a clear reference here to the golden piety of the desert, which still in the East requires a host to protect as well as feed his guest. Suppose the case even of a murderer fleeing from the avenger of blood. He speeds across the desert, his pursuers on his track; he sees an open tent, and preparation going on outside for the evening meal. Gasping for breath, he crosses the threshold of that friendly shelter, and that very moment he is safe. The owner of that tent is bound by a law which from immemorial time has been held sacredly binding in the East, not only to feed the

fugitive, but at the risk of his own life to protect him from harm, for the space of two nights and a day.

There is a beautiful lesson here for us all. We, too, have enemies on our track—the sins we have committed in the days that are gone. We have not been able to elude them. They have found our trail. Like avengers of blood they would hunt us down. But, lo ! here is the refuge in the heart and house of God. Once we enter it we are safe. He comes between us and our record. He spreads our table for us. He sets the loaf at our right hand. He bids us be of good cheer, because we are safe from all danger while under His wings. He Himself deals with our past so that we are

secure, not for two nights and a day merely, but through every night and every day, till night and day shall cease.

'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

PSALM xxiii. 6.

PART I.

WE have already seen how this psalm has deepened in spirituality with the progress of its thought. We now find it strengthening in certainty as it moves to its close. This is just what we should have expected. Anything else would have been an anti-climax. In the psalmist's experience spiritual realities passed from the realm of faith to the region of knowledge—from specu-

lative belief to demonstrated fact. This is as it should be. This is as it must be if we are to find firm foothold in the great crises of our life. Religion in its last analysis is not faith, but the knowledge that comes by faith. There are facts of the spiritual realm that are as real to many of you as those of the physical order. You are as sure of them as you are of length and breadth and thickness in the world of things. They reside among the certainties of your life. They constitute impregnable positions, from which you never can be shifted, even 'though the earth be removed, and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea.' Such a position had the psalmist won for himself, whereon he stood

fearlessly and four-square to all the winds that blew. He strikes the note of certainty. 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.' This is reasoning from induction. In this class of reasoning you first of all gather your facts from as wide a field as possible, and then form your theory. Now David had gathered into view all the facts of his strangely chequered career. He saw them shot through with a divine purpose and unified by a divine plan. Just as each individual stone of a pyramid has a set in it which points unerringly to an apex, so David saw that every incident of the divine leading in his life had a set in it that made for moral symmetry and strength. He was delivered once and for all from

the tyranny of doubt. What that deliverance meant for him only those who have passed through doubt's awful night and felt its chill can understand, for it is a darkness which can indeed be felt. There is no comfort in doubt. Neither is there any inspiration. The achieving ages of the world have all been ages of faith. Read the muster-roll of the world's worthies, the names of the men who have carved out the facts of history and led forth the destinies of the world: they have always been men of faith. Doubt is destructive; faith alone is constructive. 'Doubt' and 'double' both spring from the same root. The doubtful man is a divided, a distracted man. He is of two minds, and this halves his force.

But the sense of certainty gathers up and focuses the forces of life to the burning-point of achievement. David, then, had reached this ground of certainty. He knew that life was redeemed from caprice, and death from despair, because both were under the rule of a personal God. This is what we all require to know. Amid the awful tragedies of life, its conscious guilt, its wild unrest, its desolating griefs, its wayside graves, its vacant chairs, its darkened hearths and homes, this, above all, is what we need, the blessed certainties of faith. Faith in an everywhere present and personal God, faith in an all-redeeming Christ, faith that pierces the veil of the visible and sees the smiling face of God above,

and feels the everlasting arms beneath. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, this alone can give thee calm when the storms of life beat wildly and the waves run high, to know that thy life is being lived within the sheltering care of God. Let us grasp the truth to-day, with all the comfort it can bring, that, however obscure our lives may be, they are of concern to God. He knows us each and loves us each, and calls us each by name. May this truth come with satisfying fullness to our hearts to-day, and work in them its miracle of peace. The text is a confident forecast; but the contents of it we must leave until our next study. This daring hope, however, comes to those alone who, like the psalmist,

have pushed their way through the veil of the visible, and stood face to face with the Inscrutable Personality, of whom the visible and the tangible are merely the flowing and ever-changing robe. These are the men who can say with David, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,' and with Paul, 'I know whom I have believed,' and with Schiller, 'A God is, a Holy Will lives, however the human heart may stagger. High over all the weavings of time and of change lives the sublime purpose, and though all creatures groan in a circle of change, yet, unchanging in the midst of change, there is one Quiet Spirit.'

'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

PSALM xxiii. 6.

PART II.

IN our last study of this verse we saw to what a note of confidence the psalmist had keyed his song. 'Surely'—here is the sunniest optimism. He did not put his golden age behind him. Like Browning, the strenuous singer of our modern day, David would say:

> Grow old along with me,
> The best is yet to be.

In this view, life is regarded as a

pilgrimage. The picture is that of a caravan. God in front, then the pilgrims, then the wagons fetching up the rear with stores of provision for the coming days. 'Goodness' to supply all our needs, and 'mercy' to blot out our sins.

This idea of Mercy coming on behind is a very beautiful one. Close on our tracks she comes, forgiving all that has been wrong, and blessing all that has been right, and perfecting all that has been incomplete. Thus past, present, and future are alike secured. He prepares the table in the present, He redeems the past from its sin and its shame, and the future from its fear of want. Such spacious provision leaves nothing to be desired.

Every need has been anticipated, and care-free the soul may step down into a future filled and flooded with God.

If, however, all the comfort is to be won out of this scripture by the individual soul, care must be taken not to break the order of march. We must not allow the wagons to get between ourselves and God. In other words, the goodness of God must not be permitted to come between us and Him. We must keep the material world in its right place. A mere halfpenny may be held so close to the vision as to shut out all the burning splendours of the midnight sky. And we may take the very gifts of God and thrust them before our eyes till they obscure the Giver. Let us

come out from behind our halfpence. This life is not all. We have other and higher relations than those of time to fulfil. There is a world of spiritual being all about us, folding us round, and closing us in on every hand, with which we must come into conscious correspondence before we can attain to our best. These are our pilgrim days. This is the training-ground for our powers. Here our faith finds a fitting field for its unfolding, and our hope an atmosphere in which to spread its wings. We are moving on to that eternal society which God has been organizing from the beginning of days, and which consists of the spiritual aristocracy of every country and every

age. What wonder that preparation should be necessary for those who are to sit at meat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, with all the pure and the noble of every age and every land?

This is the period of our minority. Here we are disciplined until we come of age. The very fact of discipline suggests want of correspondence between the world within us and the world without. It is in this want of correspondence that the struggle of our human life is begotten, the issue of which, if we be but faithful, will be an ever-upward movement of our spirits, till they reach their majority and pass to their crowning in the life beyond.

Only in the fires and forges of discipline and loss can the iron of our nature be wrought up into weapons of steel for the work and service of God. No character ever yet came to perfection in the fields of prosperity. Perpetual sunshine would inevitably deface its beauty and arrest its growth. The dark days of autumn and the soaking rains of winter are not more necessary to the perfecting of the golden grain of the harvest than are the dark days in our life-history, and the rain of blinding tears, to the perfecting of the soul.

This, then, is but our camping-ground. 'We nightly pitch our moving tent a day's march nearer home.' Yonder is our

rest. Some day our pilgrimage shall cease, and we shall cross the threshold of the Father's house, to go out no more for ever.

'I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

PSALM xxiii. 6.

THE pilgrimage of a soul under the shepherdly lead of Jehovah must be progressive. That is to say, its movement must be definitely and intelligently directed to some goal, else it cannot fulfil the moral requirements which the nature of the case demands. Moreover, the end must be such as will vindicate both its start and progress. The creation of a human soul with its divine instincts, together with the tremendous risks which its moral freedom involves, requires

for its justification ends so full and satisfying as to leave no room for question as to either the goodness or the wisdom of God. Hence this psalm would be sadly incomplete without these closing words. They gather up and express with satisfying fullness of assurance the moral end and aim of all the discipline through which the soul must graduate

> For those great offices which suit
> The full-grown energies of heaven.

To start us on a pilgrimage which led no whither ; to put us in quest of that which must for ever elude ; to keep alive aspirations only for the sake of mocking instead of slaking their thirst, might be worthy occupation for a fiend,

but could never be reconciled with our ideas of God. Anything that cannot be harmonized with Infinite Wisdom and Love must be cut out of our creed. Unless we hold fast with an iron strength to the unchanging and unchangeable goodness of God, life will lose its meaning and shrivel to a span. This alone can redeem history, whether personal or collective, from confusion, and find in its seeming fortuitousness an ordered plan. All God's leading, whether by still waters or raging torrent, must tend to a terminus where every need will meet its answer, every doubt find solution, every fear be hushed to sleep, and every homesick soul find refuge within the circle of the Infinite Love. Now, this idea of homesickness is

not imported into the text. Implicitly it is already there. The certainty of the psalmist's faith leaps the gulf of physical dissolution, and finds firm foothold on the farther shore. The word 'surely,' which introduces the verse, covers its whole breadth. 'Surely . . . I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' Up to this point there has been no hint of permanence in the psalm. Everything has been suggestive of movement and change. The whole atmosphere of the poem is that of a camp life, with its countless perils, its exigencies of hunger and thirst, and its fragile tents, the only shelter from wilderness, heat, and cold. Now, in some of its aspects such a life has many attractions. Its shifting

scenes, its free-and-easy customs, its clean and healthy environments, together with the primitive simplicity of its relations, constitute a charm to which even city dwellers pay a more or less unconscious tribute every time they picnic or spread their table in the open air. But this is only one side of the picture. It makes all the difference whether such a life is self-chosen as a temporary escape from over-conventionality, or whether it is forced upon us by the necessities of circumstance. It is one thing to be able to choose our own time and place for camping out, and please ourselves as to its duration; it is quite another to be born and bred under nomadic conditions, and to be compelled, gipsy-like, to wander to and fro

upon the face of the earth, with no fixed place of abode. It is this perpetually recurring element of change which constitutes the pathos of the pilgrim's lot, and which so frequently appeals to us from prophecy and psalm. The tent-dwellers ever had an instinctive out-reaching towards something more substantial and enduring in the way of habitation. They longed for a time when the transient should give place to the abiding. 'They looked for a city that had foundations, whose Builder and Maker was God.' Now, their pilgrim days are a type of our earthly career. For the deeper we look beneath the surface of things, the more we see how fitly does this life of ours correspond to a pilgrimage. In

our truest and best moments we realize that this is not our rest. The more spiritually minded we become, the less do we feel at home. We are not content to stay here. Our instincts reach out 'for a better country, that is a heavenly.' Our text meets this instinct. 'The house of the Lord' as a symbol of security and permanence is set over against the movable desert-tent. This, however, by no means exhausts the significance of the term. Something more than a mere building, however abiding and splendidly appointed, is needed to meet our demands. Readers of Tennyson will call to mind how finely this conception is brought out in 'The Palace of Art.' No character can be perfected in isolation.

It must be set in its relations. Better the lowliest cottage in the vale, with fidelity to the trivial round and common task, than the most lordly palace, with disloyalty to the sacred trusts which our relationships impose. Who would not prefer the most uncertain tent of the wilderness, if pitched within the circle of his loved ones, to even the house of the Lord, with all its security, if it were but a splendid solitude? Even the most bleak and barren moorland is not so desolate as an empty house. The fact is, we want more than a house. We require a home! And here our text comes to our relief. The word translated 'house' is the Hebrew word for 'home.' The 'house of the Lord' is not a suite

of empty rooms. Its festal board is thronged with happy faces of our kindred; its stately halls are vocal with their song. They are absent from the body, but they are 'at home' with the Lord. The perils of the pilgrimage are over, and for ever they are safe. And what is true for them will be true for us in our time.

Here in the body pent,
Absent from Him we roam,
Yet nightly pitch our moving tent
A day's march nearer HOME.

This is the end of all the divine leading—the fellowship of the saints in light. We are saved into a society which God has been organizing from the beginning of days. Neither here nor there can a soul be perfected apart. It

is only 'with all the saints' that we can come to 'comprehend what is the height and depth and length and breadth, and know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

EPILOGUE

AND now we cannot lay down these studies without a reference to the strong personal note to which our psalm is keyed. The whole theme has been found to move within the limits of the first and second personal pronouns: 'I,' 'my,' 'mine,' 'me' and 'Thou,' 'Thy,' 'Thine,' 'Thee.' Clearly, when David wrote these words there were but two personalities present to his mind—God and his own soul.

This is for all of us the first grand necessity—to know God for ourselves, to get into touch with the

Infinite, to be in conscious correspondence with the Supreme. Religion consists in the adjustment and fulfilment of personal relations with a personal God. Until we have thus realized Him to our individual consciousness, we may have a creed, but we have not religion. Wherever we finish, this is where we must all begin.

Men separated from each other by the widest extremes of theological thought agree in this. Here, for example, is Principal Fairbairn, one of the foremost leaders of Nonconformist thought, declaring: 'Were it possible to reduce a pious soul to the consciousness of only two beings—first and pre-eminently of God, next and feebly of self—then it were possible to endow that soul

with the supremest happiness possible to a creature; and the more nearly any man approaches to that consciousness the more blessed will he be.'

Then, yonder is Cardinal Newman, in his famous *Apologia* affirming the selfsame truth when he says: 'From a very early age I have rested in the thought of two and two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings—myself and my Creator.'

Lovers of Tennyson will know how clear a note the poet struck when touching on this theme. Let his 'De Profundis' be studied in the light of the following from Mr. Wilfrid Ward's account of the manner in which Lord Tennyson, almost at the last, read to him this great poem as his deepest

confession of faith: 'He raised his eyes from the book at the seventh line and looked for a moment at his hearer with an indescribable expression of awe before he uttered the word "Spirit"—"out of the deep—Spirit—out of the deep." When he had finished the second "Greeting" he was trembling much. Then he read the prayer—a prayer, he had told me, of self-prostration before the Infinite. I think he intended it as a contrast with the analytical and reflective character of the rest. It is an outpouring of the simplest and most intense self-abandonment to the Creator, an acknowledgement, when all has been thought and said with such insight and beauty, that our best

thoughts and words are as nothing in the Great Presence.

Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !
Infinite Ideality !
Immeasurable Reality !
Infinite Personality !
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee ;
We feel we are something—*that* also has come from Thee ;
We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !

The same personal note rings out with clarion clearness when 'From the great deep to the great deep he goes,' chanting his own death-song :

I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

Robert Browning also, in

'Pauline,' discovers and reveals that religion in its last analysis resolves itself into the fulfilment of private and personal relations with God:

My God, my God, let me for once look on Thee
As though nought else existed, we alone!
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands, till I can say—even from myself
I need Thee and I feel Thee and I love Thee.

Our religion, then, is nothing if not personal. Unless we know God as a person—unless He is as real to us as the living men and women that we meet, we have not yet begun to know Him as He would be known.

David had been so filled with

this consciousness, that all else had fallen into deep perspective and faded out of thought. He had pushed his way through the veil of mere appearances till he stood in the naked essence of his own personality, face to face with the personality divine, and realized the definite place he held in the mind and heart of God. The Twenty-third Psalm is thus the God-consciousness of David set to music. It is this personal element everywhere suffusing the Psalms which makes them appeal to us so strongly. They are so intensely human. We feel the throb of them, and our pulses leap responsively to their passion and pain. They are crystallized laughter and tears—the history of the human heart, its joys and

sorrows, its victories and defeats, in song. The Psalms are poetry. Men cannot write poetry every day. It is only in the supreme moments of life that they break into song. Why, we cannot even read poetry every day. There are dull and drab days in our history, when Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Browning, and Tennyson have no message for us. We are out of key. The springs of genius become mere frozen fountains to the cold-hearted, and are all locked up in dullness to the dull. Thus it comes to pass that the Psalms have to be spiritually grown up to. They are the product of life, and can be interpreted only through life. They are experience done into verse. They have been wrung out of men by their joys

and sorrows, by their hopes and fears. Here you find a triumph and there a threnody, here the low wail of defeated ambition, of baffled purpose and shattered plan, and then again the loud paean of realized expectation and victorious hope. We shall never outgrow the Psalms. They say for us what we have all felt, but could never say for ourselves. Life-chords are struck here to which the hearts of men in every age respond. In the experience of every one of us there are passages from this Book which shine like stars. When we think of the personal trials they have brightened, the sorrows they have vanquished, the fears they have put to flight, and the mighty hopes they have fed and sustained—when we call

to mind the thousands who have marched down to death with tremorless lips, to the music of the Twenty-third Psalm, who can doubt that these majestic hymns, which have been our songs in the house of our pilgrimage, will blend with the anthems of the Upper Sanctuary, and enrich the deep, full music of the skies !

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